

# FRONTIERS OF EUROPE



THESE are advantages in insulation or insularity or whatever you care to call the process of living in an island. You at least know for certain when you have gone abroad. If the head is clear, it is quite easy to see where New Zealand ends, and it is equally easy to see from a dry ship where Australia begins. Britain, too, shares those advantages, but the unfortunate European finds himself in a very different position.

Most European frontiers are artificial, and are based on no such physical barrier as that presented by the sea. In some cases a large river marks the boundary (for instance the Rhine between Alsace and Germany); in others the top of a range of hills. But often the division is merely an arbitrary line drawn upon the map at some peace treaty—a line which crosses a comparatively featureless landscape. It must not be imagined that a twelve foot wall is built along the border or an impassable wire fence stretching for mile upon mile. This is not the case, for there is no International Fencing Act to determine which of the sovereign states shall pay for it. On the roads there is a gate of the continental crossing type with a sentry or a policeman to lean against it, but off the roads, there is often nothing to show where the frontier runs.

This lack of landmarks once led to the discomfiture of two Alpine climbers, and cost them a day or two in gaol. Monte Rosa (15,217ft.) lies on the borders of Switzerland and Italy, and the climbers were making an ascent from the Swiss side when, at the height of about 13,000ft. above sea level, they were bailed up by an Italian patrol and charged with illegally crossing the Italian frontier (a by no

means uncommon thing in Mussolini's day). Nothing would persuade the guards that they were there for pleasure and they languished in an entirely uncomfortable prison until the British Consul arrived to extract them.

The artificiality of frontiers has other drawbacks. One of the most curious divisions occurs in the town of Konstanz, a picturesque lakeside resort on the German-Swiss boundary. In this case the line runs through the suburbs of the town itself, and the frontier post is situated half-way down a suburban street. A passport is required to go shopping if you happen to be a Swiss, and the last five and a-half years while Hans at No. 22 has been fighting for Fuehrer and Country, Carl at No. 23 has been unspeakably neutral.

In many cases the legislators, in drawing up their treaty, have shown little respect for existing property, and you may well find that, as a result of a frontier adjustment, you possess a house in Ruritania, while the whare across the yard is an outpost of Bolonia. A practical case will suffice to demonstrate your difficulties. A woman living on the U.S.-Canadian Border recently petitioned Congress for leave to import her parrot into the United States. It appears that she had been in the habit of keeping it in the kitchen in Canada, and was anxious to move it to the living room which was just across the border. The story in this case has a happy ending, but it is not always so.

When the time comes to re-draw the map of Europe, after the War, no doubt further minor discomforts and worries will be arranged for frontier dwellers.